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# TRIBUTE

TO THE MEMORY OF

# COUNT ADOLPHE DE CIRCOURT,

A FOREIGN HONORARY MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY.

BY

HON. ROBERT C. WINTHROP, LL.D.

PRESIDENT.

PRIVATELY REPRINTED FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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## MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

At a meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society, in Boston, Jan. 8, 1880, the President, Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, paid the following tribute to the memory of Count Adolphe de Circourt, an Honorary Member, news of whose death had been received since the last meeting: —

Count Adolphe de Circourt was elected a foreign Honorary Member of this Society on the 8th of November, 1860. He died on the 17th of last November (1879), at La Celle St. Cloud, not far from Paris, in the seventy-eighth year of his age. I owed my personal acquaintance with him to the historian Prescott, who kindly gave me a note of introduction to him on my first visit to Europe in 1847. From that time until his death I had enjoyed the privilege of his friendship and correspondence; not many months passing away during that long period without our exchanging letters. By a striking coincidence our last letters to each other were written on the same day, and that day was just three days before his death, and only one day before he was struck by the sudden shock which rendered him unconscious, and under which he gradually sunk. His closing words to me — and perhaps his last written words to any one — were: "My health is scarcely better, yet I begin tolerably the winter season. Faithfully and gratefully yours, A. Circourt."

You will indulge me, Gentlemen, I am sure, if I dwell for a few moments on the character and accomplishments of one whom I had known so long, and whom I valued so highly. His name was placed on our rolls at the concurrent suggestion of the late Mr. Ticknor and myself. Mr. Ticknor had

known him, and corresponded with him, ten years before I had, and had learned, with Prescott and Bancroft, to appreciate his great abilities and acquirements.

In Ticknor's "Life of Prescott" will be found a tribute to Circourt, while he was yet a young man, such as hardly any other man, since "the admirable Crichton," has ever received. It is quoted from the History of the Revolution of 1848, by the poet-president of the French Republic of that year, Lamartine. "This person," says Lamartine, in vindicating his appointment of him to a foreign mission, "little known as yet out of the aristocratic world, a man of literature and learning, is M. de Circourt. He had been employed in diplomacy under the restoration. The Revolution of July (1830) had thrown him into retirement and opposition, being more inclined to legitimacy than democracy. He had profited of these years of seclusion to devote himself to studies which would have absorbed many men's lives, but which were only the diversions of his own life. Languages, races, geography, history, philosophy, travels, constitutions, religions of peoples from the infancy of the world down to our own day, from Thibet even to the Alps, — he had incorporated them all into his mind, had reflected upon them all, had retained them all. One might question him on the universality of facts and ideas which make up the world, without his being obliged, in order to give an answer, to consult any other volumes than his own memory, — a vast extent, surface, and depth of information, of which no one ever knew the bottom or the limits, — a living world-chart of human knowledge, — a man all head, and whose head was at the height of all truths; impartial meantime, indifferent as to systems, as a being who was only intelligence, and who held to human nature only by observation and curiosity. M. de Circourt had married a young Russian girl of an aristocratic family and of a European spirit. Through her he had relations to all which was eminent in the literary or court circles of Germany and of the North. He had resided at Berlin, and had ties with the statesmen of Prussia. The King of Prussia, a literary and liberal sovereign, had honored him with some degree of intimacy at his court. M. de Circourt, without being a republican at heart, was sufficiently impressed by the grand horizon which a French republic, springing up from the progressive and pacific genius of a new France, could open to the human mind, to salute and to serve that republic. He comprehended with Lamartine that Liberty had need of Peace, and that Peace must be found at Berlin and London."

Such was the portrait of Count Circourt in a history published thirty years ago, and such were the impressions of his capacity and character under which Lamartine, during his "three months of power," made him the envoy of the French Republic to the Prussian Court. There is authority for thinking that he would gladly have sent him as Minister to Washington; but the jealousy of the French liberals at that period would not allow their new republic to be represented in our old republic by one who had been so recently and so intimately associated with the *ancien régime*. It was even whispered that our own Minister at Paris discouraged the appointment. Circourt had, indeed, been a perfect stranger to all the preparations of the Revolution of 1848, and had uttered no words in praise of it, after it was accomplished. But he had lived for twenty years on a footing of personal friendship with Lamartine, and had entire faith in the goodness of his intentions, and in the purity and patriotism of his motives; and he was unwilling to refuse to serve him, and to serve his country, in any way in his power. More especially would he not decline to co-operate with him for the preservation of peace, and for the cultivation of friendly relations between Prussia and France.

He was not, as we have seen, wholly a stranger to diplomacy. As a very young man, nearly twenty years before, he had been employed in the administrative service of his country, in the home department and in the foreign department successively. He was associated with the Counts Bois-le-Comte, Flavigny, and Louis de Viel-Castel in the department of foreign affairs, under the ministry of Prince Polignac, when the Revolution of 1830 overthrew Charles X.; and Ticknor said of him at Dresden in 1836, "to the honor of his personal consistency he refuses still to wear the tri-colored cockade." He was a legitimist in principle, I think, to the end of his life. But there was nothing narrow or illiberal in his political views, or in the expression of them. He had the largest respect for every form of good government, and especially for our own republic as administered in its earlier days. It was plain, however, that he had not pliancy enough for continued success in political life, amid all the changes of system and dynasty of which for so many years France was the theatre. Nor did he covet office. Returning from Berlin at the close of Lamartine's brief though brilliant presidency, he betook himself anew to those varied pursuits in which he had been previously absorbed, and was never again in public service.

Circourt was not yet fifty years old when he won the tribute from Lamartine, who had known him from his youth. Thirty years more of life awaited him, and he was never weary of reading, investigation, and study. Perhaps the very variety and multiplicity of his studies and acquirements, and the intense eagerness of his mind to know and master every thing, disabled him from grappling with any single theme, or attempting any one great literary work. Thierry, the historian of the Norman conquest, once said to Ticknor, "If Circourt would but choose some obscure portion of history between A.D. 500 and 1600, and write upon it, he would leave us all behind." So said more than one of those who knew him best. But he could not be persuaded to limit or circumscribe the freedom of his pursuits in literature. His pen was, indeed, never idle in correspondence, in criticism, and in reviews of the writings of others. He was a frequent contributor to "La Bibliothéque Universelle" of Geneva, to "Les Nouvelles Annales des Voyages," to "La Revue Britannique," "L'Opinione Publique," and to other well-known periodicals of Paris and of the Continent; and the range of his writings was hardly less extensive and varied than that of his reading. I have a little collection of two volumes of a part of his productions, as he sent them to me from time to time, and there are not a few others which he has sent directly to our Library. They embrace such subjects as The Young Prince Waldemar's Travels in India; the Life of Frederic William IV. of Prussia; The Russians on the Amoor; The Empire of the Czars; Travels in Africa; The King of Dahomey; The Archæology of Tunis; The Primitive Aryans; A Visit to the Field of the Battle of Hastings; Canterbury; St. Paul's Cathedral; Westminster Abbey; Macaulay's History of England; The History of the Restoration, by Viel-Castel; Victor Cousin's French Society and Illustrious Women of the Seventeenth Century; The Life and Works of Madame Swetchine; The History of the Swiss Confederation; Cino da Pistoja; and Italy's latest Poet, Manzoni.

But there are many titles of his notices and reviews which have a nearer interest for ourselves, and which give him a more special claim to a grateful remembrance on this side of the Atlantic. Nothing gratified Prescott more than Circourt's review of his "Ferdinand and Isabella," and no other, as Ticknor said, "could be compared to it in amplitude and elaborateness." He had personally known Albert Gallatin, too, and he exhibited the warmest interest — inspired by the subject not less than by the author — in reviewing his Synop-

sis of our Indian Tribes contained in the "Archæologia" of the American Antiquarian Society. Bancroft's "History of the United States," Ticknor's "Spanish Literature," Kirk's "Charles the Bold," George P. Marsh's "Man and Nature," "The Life and Letters of John Winthrop," and at least one of Parkman's volumes, were successively the subjects of his able and discriminating pen. The last labor which he performed on any American topic was his translation into French of Bancroft's volume on "The Alliance of France and the United States in 1778." In connection with that translation, and with the valuable original documents which Mr. Bancroft placed at his disposal for the purpose, making up a work of three octavo volumes, he published an original Historical Sketch of the American Revolution from his own point of view, which, having been translated for us into English, anonymously, by an accomplished lady, forms a part of one of our recent volumes of Proceedings.

Circourt delighted to gratify his friends in Europe and in America, and to associate his own name with theirs, by reviewing their works. Yet he never suffered personal friendships or partialities to pervert or warp his judgment, or to prevent a frank, independent utterance of his own opinions. He was a man of transparent sincerity, true always to his own convictions, and as just as he was amiable and accomplished. Prescott, writing to him in 1856, in reply to his remarks on "Philip the Second," says: "What gave me no less pleasure than your general commendation was the list of *errata* which accompanied it: not that I was happy to find I had made so many blunders, but that I possessed a friend who had the candor and sagacity to point them out. I am filled with astonishment when I reflect on the variety, the minuteness, and the accuracy of your knowledge. With this subject, thrown up by chance before you, you seem to be as familiar as if it had been your *spécialité*."

His reviews were no mere perfunctory notices, interspersed with sample passages and salient citations. They were honest and thorough treatments of the volumes in hand, often supplying facts which had been overlooked or omitted, and sometimes showing that he was more familiar with the subject than the author himself.

Circourt was not less remarkable for his private correspondence than for his published essays and reviews, and his correspondents included many eminent men of all countries. He was a particular friend and favorite for many years of Pasquier, the illustrious Chancellor of France, who had known

Franklin when he was our Minister at Paris, and who died in 1862, in the full possession of his faculties, at ninety-five years of age. In the Life of the Chancellor by his late secretary, M. Louis Favre, published in 1870, a large number of his letters to Circourt will be found, and they are introduced by an account of him derived from the impressions of the venerable chancellor, as well as from the personal knowledge of the author. It is not less striking than the tribute of Lamartine, in 1848. "M. de Circourt," says Favre, "speaks all languages, knows all literatures and all histories. Scarce a volume is published — I do not say in France, but in the world — without his reading it; and, what is more extraordinary, when he has read it he knows it by heart. I have seen him often, on the same evening, discussing with Englishmen the articles contained in the journals and reviews of England; passing to the publications of Germany to discuss them with Germans; then talking of Italy with Italians, and of America with citizens of that great country; himself, meantime, mistaken successively for an Englishman, a German, an Italian, and an American; and, finally, exciting the admiration and astonishment of all by the universality of his knowledge."

Count Circourt was born in the vicinity of Nancy, Sept. 22, 1801. His father, a man of rare virtue and great accomplishments, had been in the military service of France, and had shared in all the perils and sufferings of the Emigration, before he married and established himself in Lorraine. But both father and mother died while he, their eldest son, was still a boy. Educated partly at Besançon and partly in Paris, his natural relations were to the religion of his native country, and he never renounced them. But he had not the slightest tinge of intolerance or bigotry. He distinguished and loved what is best in all churches. Père Hyacinthe and Dean Stanley were among his most esteemed friends, and he often expressed the warmest sympathy with their views. No one had a deeper faith in an overruling Providence, in the goodness and justice of God, and in the truth of Christianity.

He was called to a great sorrow in the terrible accident which befell his wife, and which terminated her life after a few years of suffering. That "young Russian girl," as Lamartine had styled her in 1848, Anastasia de Klustine, had become, as the Countess de Circourt, one of the most remarkable women in French society. In her little *salon*, in the Rue de Saussayes, were to be seen all who were most distinguished in the literature and the statesmanship of Paris and of

the continent. She spoke at least as many languages as her husband. Not a few of her charming letters are found in the Life of Cavour, who was among her most confidential friends. A kind note of introduction from her secured me an interview with him, at one of the most critical periods of his career. "No one," he said to me, "with a note from Madame de Circourt must pass through Turin without my seeing him, however engrossed I may be in public affairs." But I may not dwell longer on such reminiscences. She died many years ago, and Circourt's home was left desolate. They had no children.

He has left two younger brothers, at least one of whom, Count Albert, is well known as an author and in public station, and his name has been confounded with that of our deceased member in some of the newspaper accounts of the death. I know not what may have been left by my lamented friend, in the way of letters or memoirs. His little château at La Celle St. Cloud was occupied by the Prussians during the siege of Paris, and he returned to find many things destroyed and every thing in confusion. It is to be hoped that some more adequate notice of so remarkable a man — biography or autobiography — may not be wanting to literary history hereafter. He had never visited America. He had been a great traveller in other parts of the world, but he shrank from the long ocean voyage. Most of his American friends had preceded him to the grave. One of them, our late estimable fellow-citizen, Mr. Coolidge, of whom he had seen much in Europe, and for whom he had a warm regard, passed away from us just as the tidings of his death reached us from Europe. I have felt it all the more incumbent on me not to omit paying this little tribute to his memory. If Bancroft had been here, and with us on this occasion, he might have done it more fully and more worthily, but not with a deeper sense of its justice than my own. Neither of us can fail to feel sincerely how great a loss we have sustained in the death of a friend and correspondent so amiable and obliging, so entertaining and instructive, and of so vast a range of information and accomplishment. It hardly remains for either of us to lose another like him.

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